Unfocussed language acquisition? The presentation of linguistic situations in biographical narration

Franceschini, Rita

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Historical Social Research, Vol. 31 — 2006 — No. 3, 29-49

Unfocussed Language Acquisition? The Presentation of Linguistic Situations in Biographical Narration

Rita Franceschini *

Abstract: Against the background of the turn towards constructivism and its impact on the current discussion of methodology, the author of the article reconstructs the specific, interactive plausibilization that autobiographical narrative achieves. The analysis focuses on those sequences where the narrator describes her language acquisition processes. Behavioural data (her elaborate knowledge of German, which is obvious throughout the interview) are contrasted with the account of her crucial experiences where she states having acquired German mainly through the medium of television. The specific role of suffering is highlighted and connected to results from the field of language acquisition research and related to the narrator, demonstrating how closely successful acquisition and emotions are related to each other.

1. Introduction: On the Quantum-Theoretical Turning Point

Today we are faced with a shift of paradigms that could not be more radical, not just in linguistics, but in the humanities in general. We are about to take something serious that had been spelled out in the Heisenberg principle, i.e.,

* Address all communications to: Rita Franceschini, Universität des Saarlandes, Fachrichtung 4.2: Romanistik, Postfach 15 11 50, 66041 Saarbrücken, Germany;
e-mail: r.franceschini@mx.uni-saarland.de.
First published: Franceschini, Rita (2003, September). Unfocussed Language Acquisition? The Presentation of Linguistic Situations in Biographical Narration [62 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], *4*(3), Art. 19.
Available at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-03/3-03franceschini-e.htm.
Author's note: This text is based on a German version. Thanks to Gerhard RIEMANN, who provided a first English version, and to the other anonymous reviewers.

that no observation and thus no data are neutral with regard to the observer. The observer, the observation, and the observed objects constitute an indivisible unity (HEISENBERG, 1955); they are footholds of triangulation (LAMNEK, 1995). I would like to designate this turning point as *quantum-theoretical turning point*.

This turning point is marked by the fact that the way in which methods and all related technical procedures are accessed is regarded to be of central significance. This access does not just change the object, but the method creates the object as something that we deem real in a certain historical moment. The object is being constituted by the method; both method and object are indivisibly linked to each other. A neutral and detached contemplation of "nature" is thus impossible.

In the context of this important discussion centering on method, there are special challenges for the biographical approach. Biographical research is based on various hermeneutic instruments that have to become part of the triangulation just like other instruments (statistics, microscopes, software, etc.). That means, e.g., that even the effects of a text (film as well) on a researcher/reader have to be seen as instruments of interpretation: What kind of relationship does the oral or written text establish with the experiencer (e.g. reader, listener, consumer)? Which observer is addressed? How do emotions get roused in certain parts? What about intercultural differences within the interaction between reader and text? The effects on researchers/readers, their biographies, and experiences with intertextuality and interculturality, must not be excluded as instruments of interpretation (as in discussions of objectivism), but rather must be taken into account. The triangulation between observer, observation and observed objects leads to an unstable, culturally sensitive constitution of shared interpretations which appear as "reality," "truth," "assumption of shared background," "discourse," "history," "autobiography," etc.—slightly different in every other moment. This is the basis for the non-repeatability of social events in their full complexity: The same event can always occur in a slightly different way; prior utterances and prior actions have consequences for the future and create conditions for subsequent actions which we can never exactly predict.

After the increase of interest in the sociology of knowledge (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1966), discussion about the "dependence of every observation on instruments" (LUHMANN, 1997, p.1118; LUHMANN, 1995; KNORR-CETINA, 1984) has received within the past several years strong impetus from sociological and philosophical systems theory. But this constructivist turn, as it is often called in a simplified way, has also generated postmodern solipsisms, and a jingle of misleading, mysterious words. Quite often fashionable labels conceal a loss of methodological orientation and FEYERABEND's principle of "anything goes" (FEYERABEND, 1975) serves as a license for loose thinking.

One can observe this loss of methodological orientation in many places. I think that one of the most basic challenges after the quantum-theoretical turn consists in developing procedures for a consistently interrelated triangulation. An important procedure should assure, e.g., that different expectancies are taken into account (FRANCESCHINI, 1998b). The importance of expectancies is especially emphasized in systems theory.

We are barely in the beginning stage of developing suitable instruments and ways of thinking to meet this challenge. The quantum-theoretical turn basically means that variability has to become the central term, dynamics have to be modeled[1], and blurred fringes have to be accepted as demarcations between phenomena. Accepting such a paradigm implies the need for constant calibrations; one's own observations have to be constantly reflected upon, and "tuned" to the observation that is being communicated; and the heuristics of arriving at all propositions have to be observed. Self-observation is to be expected.

The difficulties are especially multiple in the case of interpretive procedures, which are increasingly used in biographical research. A challenge that must not be underestimated consists of the fact that one's own "biosis"—the gendered observer as a living, cultural being—serves as the central instrument in interpreting. We are our own microscopes. We calibrate our ways of thinking.

The complexity of such an approach is evident, and we are still in the beginning stage of this methodological reflection. It seems to me that choosing a commonly observed biographical narrative (in this issue of the journal) is an especially sensible starting point for a methodological discussion. Preserving Hülya's narration as a point of triangulation makes it possible to locate the two other points more clearly. Please forgive my mechanistic metaphors for describing the "trial run" of this issue of *FQS*. Of course, "doing biographical research" means much more. With regard to the above mentioned paradigm one can ask questions like the following: How is it possible to establish collective memberships in spite of evident differences? How is constancy created in spite of discontinuities? How does one reach agreement in spite of instances of vagueness? And to be more specific, how do persons constitute a life course by narrating—a life course that they feel is coherent? Which linguistic means do narrators use to create a coherence that is supposed to appear plausible to the interviewers? On the basis of which observed properties do we constitute analyses, how do we determine the inner constitution of properties?

This is a much too ambitious program. But at least I will respond to the request "to do biographical research" by trying to consolidate observation posts.

In this sense I would first like to explain a few terms and explicate the constitutive circle—the spiral constitution in the interview—which is the basis of

[1] There are some suggestions for models in linguistics, e.g., the studies by Wolfgang WILDGEN, e.g., WILDGEN & MOTTRON (1987) and WILDGEN (1999), that depend upon the theories of René THOM; cf. FRANCESCHINI (1998c) with regard to the use of several languages and varieties.

my approach to the interview. Then I would like to engage in a few analyses that pertain to Hülya's narrative approach to the thematic complex of language: language acquisition, communication, and interaction. This interest developed on the basis of the observation that Hülya speaks excellent German, which is rare in the classical first generation immigrant circles in Germany. She mentions that she just needed six years to learn German. How does Hülya tell about this? How does she explain it to her interview partners? How does she enact the process of language acquisition in the interview?[2]

Let us start with some explications of terms and general reflections on the constitution of autobiographical narrations.

2. The Spiral Constitution in the Interview

When persons tell their life history in an interview situation they select from an unlimited store of individual experiences: This could be a sufficiently general assumption about what a narrator is doing in an autobiographical interview. Therefore, the first task of the narrator consists of a drastic selection and compression. Furthermore, the narration is being arranged and detailed from different perspectives with reference to the interviewer, and the declared and undeclared purpose of the interview; in doing so, the experiential units are selected and demarcated.

The dyad of interviewee and interviewer is constitutive for narrating an (auto-) biographical life course. I would like to use the term "biography" for designating the product of this interaction. This term denotes the product of this communication process that is shaped in a specific way (in a moment together T with an interaction partner P). That means that the narrator latently holds her/his life course at her/his disposal in an inner coherence, while the biography makes use of it in shaping specific excerpts, making them coherent accord-

[2] Because of the special linguistic interest of my paper, my analysis is based on the original transcription of the interview that had been conducted in German. But my analysis will be sufficiently general for it to be understood by readers without knowledge of the German language. Narratives in which persons talk about languages they have acquired through different methods are the focus of researchers who participate in a cooperative project of the Universities of Basel and Prague (title: "Life with different languages," members: Rita FRANCESCHINI, Lucie HASOVA, Georges LUEDI, Johanna MIECZNIKOWSKI-FÜNFSCHILLING, Jiri NEKVAPIL, financed by the Swiss National Foundation between 1995 and 1998, project number: 7CZPJ048495). We have called the narratives that revolve around acquiring one's own language and are embedded in narrative interviews (SCHÜTZE, 1987) *language biographies*. I had collected language biographies as a database for my own habilitation thesis (cf. FRANCESCHINI, 1998a, English short version; FRANCESCHINI, 2000). Cf. FRANCESCHINI (2001a; 2001b; forthcoming) and FÜNFSCHILLING (1998) on language biographies. An edited volume is being prepared. Prior or similar studies: KUMMER-HUDABIUNIGG (1986); LUCKMANN (1981); STEINMÜLLER (1992); ZINI (1992).

ing to different purposes, moments, and interaction partners in the concrete interaction. We feel as the same person from childhood, but we have already told more or less slightly different biographies. This freedom in adjusting and referring to the interviewer ("recipient design" according to SACKS, 1992) is basically constitutive for biographical narration as well.

This becomes visible in the fact that objects of reference are constituted in the narratives that are designed for the specific comprehension of the respective interview partner. Telling about my memories of my grandmother differs when telling them to my son, my doctor or my partner. Just imagine the kinds of assumptions about what the interaction partner is familiar with (with regard to knowledge, vocabulary, etc.). I assume prior knowledge, make assumptions and anticipate possible reactions. What I expect from my partner becomes so important that it has consequences for my verbal means: When are short allusions, technical terms, and paraphrases in everyday language adequate? The expectancies shape the choice of the linguistic form in every interaction situation.

The dimension of interaction is the hic et nunc (the moment T) in which a biography is being told (cf. Fig. 1), but, of course, objects of reference are constructed and elaborated in a biography which are embedded in a temporal axis. They are related to a moment T-1: past events and experiences are compared or connected with present events and experiences, past events are explained to the interaction partner.

On the one hand, the presentational dimension makes it possible to make inferences about events, attitudes, and circumstances concerning the narrator, on the other hand there are collective references as well (for example, events of war, political circumstances, emigration practices of whole groups, etc.). Even when these references are conveyed in a personal narrative—think of Hülya's description of her health check at the Turkish emigration office—they transcend the experiences of a single individual. Both individual and collective references constitute what I would like to call the presentational dimension of the biography (cf. Figure 1).[3]

The situation of interaction and the presentational dimension are closely related. The biography emerges in a spiral movement in this circular process in which actual circumstances of the interaction merge with references to the past. Both interview partners are active designers and take part in constituting the biography (e.g. by way of their expectations, their mutual assumptions of prior knowledge).

[3] The *oral history* method or movement relies too much on this possibility. In doing so, practitioners of oral history tend to essentialize the presentational dimension and move the constitutive moment of generating the hic et nunc of the interview situation into the background.

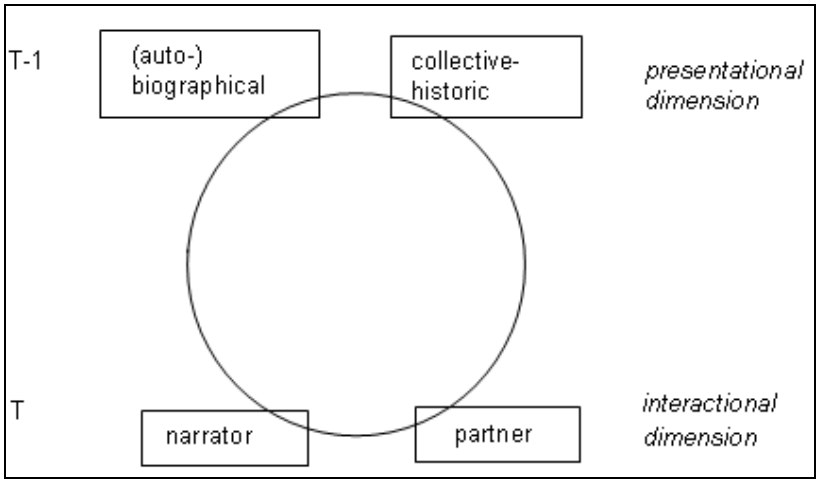

Figure 1: Biographical narrating: a feedback accomplishment

In Hülya's narrative one can find (as in many interviews) direct and indirect clues to how both participants—the interviewee and the interviewers— fashion the character of the interview. This reveals itself not just in their further queries or in the types of questions asked, but also in the quite specific linguistic or, what is more, lexical design chosen by both sides. By doing so, they present themselves as communication partners who have their own history. For example, Hülya never mentions the name of the village, the province or region where she is from, thereby indicating in an indirect way something of her assumptions about how much her interview partners know.[4] In this context the choice of the German language for the interview is the clearest contextualization cue that Hülya is talking to persons who do not share with her certain linguistic skills. Thus the linguistic means is an indication of what Hülya expects Germans to know about Turkey. These are expectations that are grounded in her repeated experiences in the past. And when looking at her interview partners one can find the same process of reflexivity of taking into account their own experiences of communication.

[4] If Hülya had mentioned the name it would probably have been masked. But one does not find anything of that in the interview. The interviewers write down the geographical information in their field notes as an appendix to the transcription. Maybe this had been mentioned in prior conversations (e.g., when arranging the date of the interview). But this is not the point: When reading the interview it can be noticed that Hülya takes "into account" that her interviewers do not know very much about Turkey. And they also do not ask any elaborative questions when Hülya engages in generalizing her representations of Turkey.

I am thus especially interested in the specific aspect of *talking about language*. I will concentrate on this aspect, since it is an especially interesting phenomenon:

1) how Hülya speaks German in the interview;
2) how she talks about the process of acquiring these German language skills;
3) how she formulates and expresses these processes.

3. The Key Sequence

The central moment in which Hülya talks about her acquisition of the German language starts in the second half of page 15 (in the translation). She is talking about the years of 1976 to 1977. In a narrative sequence about her notice of termination from her job, she mentions in passing that she owned a television set at that time ("/Eh/ by the way /eh/ I also had TV then" [g.1309, e.743][5]). Before this remark and afterwards she talks about how it became necessary to authorize a lawyer because of her dismissal and how she had to manage everything by herself.

The sequence about her way of learning German is thus an embedded longer sided sequence which extends to the joint laughter between the interviewer and Hülya when she says, "Therefore ((she laughs)) I have a very good opinion about TV. Because of the German language" (g.1331, e.749). Thus, this sequence serves as an argument within the sequence in which Hülya talks about her rights. In this context she talks about her growing linguistic skills and the important role played by the television in the process of her German language acquisition. This sequence is well contoured by Hülya and her interviewers (cf. the final joint laughter) and therefore lends itself to a thorough analysis. To simplify matters, I present the sequence (in German and English):

[5] With the first number, we refer always to the line of the original German transcript, where the quotation begins, with the second to the English translated version. For the consultation of the entire German text see http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-03/Huelya-d.htm, the English translation is available at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-03/Huelya-e.htm.

1308. ... /Eh/
1309. übrigens /eh/, da hab ich auch Fernsehen gehabt. Ich hab auch mit Außen bißchen Kontakt
1310. gehabt, nicht? Aber
1311. I: hm
1312. H: von mir aus,
1313. I: hm
1314. H: ich hab immer so 'was gelesen, immer noch keine
1315. Kontakt mit deutsche Leute gehabt,
1316. I: hm
1317. H: auch 77 nich. 78 auch nich.
1318. I: ((leise)) Ist ja hart.
1319. H: Also praktisch /eh/ lerne ich /eh/ seit.. 79/80 deutsch, nicht von 72. Ich hab von 72
1320. I: hm
1321. H: bis
1322. 80 nicht deutsch gesprochen. Ich hab nur vom Hören von Fernsehen,
1323. I: hm
1324. H: wenn ich eine Wort
1325. gehört hab, /eh/ und da hab ich immer die Leute gefragt, was das bedeutet,
1326. I: hm
1327. H: und hab ich mir
1328. aufgeschrieben und so. Ich hab nich richtig deutsch gelernt, nur vom Hören, vom Mund, vom
1329. Fernsehen.
1330. I: hm
1331. H: Deshalb halte ich ((lacht)) vom Fernsehen sehr viel, wegen deutsche Sprache.
1332. ((alle lachen))

The (somewhat simplified) English translation of this sequence is (e.742-750):

742. /Eh/ I said, "I have to do all of this by myself. I have to get my experiences." /Eh/ by the way
743. /eh/ I also had TV then. I also had a little contact with the outside, you know. But I took the
744. initiative. I always read something. I still had no contact with German people. Also (not yet) in
745. 1977, 1978. *(That's hard.((in a low voice)))* That means, actually /eh/ I am learning /eh/
746. German since .. 1979/80, not since 1972. I didn't speak German from 1972 to 1980. I only (got
747. it) from hearing television, when I heard a word /eh/ then I always asked people what it means.
748. And then I wrote it down and that's how it went. I didn't learn German in the right way. Just
749. from hearing, from the mouth, from TV. Therefore ((she laughs)) I have a very good opinion
750. about TV. Because of the German language ((she and the interviewers laugh)). [22]

Excerpt 1: Language acquisition (g.1308, e.742)[6]

[6] This is also interesting with regard to the mutual assumptions: Hülya seems to take into account that television is not significant in the life world of her interviewers. The coda of the side sequence (demarcated by their joint laughter) makes it possible for Hülya to save face and reach a consensus with her interview partners. It is an especially skillful move on Hülya's part that she accomplishes this by initiating their joint "falling into laughter."

It is surprising that Hülya mentions that she did not speak German between 1972 (the year of her arrival in Germany) and 1980 and that she had almost no contact with Germans during this period. This is also surprising because she had developed considerable linguistic competencies—even stylistic subtleties—during the six years of actively learning German (as she says). The interview takes place in 1986. Her vocabulary is quite differentiated—much more so than the vocabulary that is necessary for her work, the communication in her immediate environment and for her dealings with authorities. Her vocabulary in medical matters is especially rich because of obvious critical events in her life. But she also knows special idiomatic expressions like "Sie können auch nich(t) tun und lassen, was sie wollen" ("They cannot do as they like" [g.1840, e.1026]), many abstract words which also have very specific cultural "German" connotations like "Geselligkeit" ("sociablity") (g.1704, e.957). She joins together the three terms "Menschlichkeit, (...) Gesellschaft, (...) Geselligkeit" ("humaneness, society, and sociability") (g.1701, e.957) in a rhetorically effective way. She knows alternatives with a special sarcastic flavor: "Ich bin nicht diese... brave... Hausmütterchen oder Haustöchterchen." ("I am not this... good... little mother of the family or the little daughter of the family" [g.1649, e.927]). She also knows rare and exquisite expressions like "raetselhaft" ("puzzling"), verbs like "geprägt sein" ("to be shaped") and "zu ihnen stossen" ("to join them"). She applies hypothetical sentence constructions like "if I had said that I would get married" (e.175). These are elaborate linguistic forms which first-generation immigrants very rarely acquire (persons who have spontaneously acquired their German in the context of immigration). Hülya makes use of her German to present complex matters and to develop a good emotional rapport with the interviewers.

Even though Hülya's interlingual competence is certainly on an advanced level, this does not mean that she does not make mistakes (in a normative sense). Her German contains simplifications that seem to have fossilized. For instance, she regularizes the complex German flexion of possessives and adjectives that become similar in German according to gender, number and case (with a system of endings like *-es*, *-em*, *-e*, *-em*, *-s*, etc.) by just using *-e*. She almost regularly says "meine Mann" when referring to "my husband" ("mein Mann"), just like she says "unsere," "meine," "keine," "andere," "aeltere," "eigene," "soziale," "ihre,"—regardless of the gender, the number, and the case of the noun. In this way the German paradigm is being morphologically simplified which reminds us of the very regular Turkish morphological system.

Hülya's German also reveals obvious deviations from the norm with regard to the article. German has three genders: masculine, feminine, neutral. The placement and omission of the article, especially in the plural, follows difficult rules. Her dominant strategy is to omit the article in plural occasionally, but much less so in the later part of the interview. One can also discover cases of the omission of the copula.

Hülya's German is characterized by those verbal forms that one can usually detect in the informal conversations of natives from this particular area; e.g., omitting the final consonant -T in "nicht" ("not") which Hülya pronounces "nich" most of the time, or the apocopes in "hab" instead of "habe" (have). Also the informal "kriegen" (for "to get," and "to receive") is influenced by the oral register. These forms are indications of the direct oral contact with native speakers that Hülya seems to have had, whether in "real" life or by "just" watching television.

Hülya seems to have been a successful learner. She has acquired her competencies on her own. How did she accomplish this according to her narrative?

3.1. Hülya's learning strategies

Despite her emphasis on the passive reception of oral language through exposure to television[7], in the aforementioned sequence Hülya reveals a multitude of learning strategies and persons who are related to her language acquisition. One after the other:

1. "Fernseher" – "TV "
2. "bisschen Kontakt mit aussen (...) von mir aus" – "a little contact with the outside (....) I took the initiative"
3. "gelesen" – "read"
4. "keine Kontakt mit deutsche Leute gehabt" (i.e. vor 1980) – "had no contact with German people" (i.e., before 1980)
5. "praktisch (...) lerne ich (...) seit .. 79/80 deutsch" – "actually (...) I am learning (...) German since ... 1979/80"
6. "bis 80 (...) nur vom Hoeren" – "to 1980 (...) only (got it) from hearing"
7. "Leute gefragt" – "asked people"
8. "mir aufgeschrieben" – "wrote it down"
9. "nich richtig deutsch gelernt" – "didn't learn German in the right way"
10. "nur vom Hoeren, vom Mund, vom Fernsehen" – "Just from hearing, from the mouth, from TV" [28]

In fact, this sequence does not just reveal passive and receptive strategies (1, 6, 10), but also strategies of taking the initiative (2, 7); and there are both oral strategies and strategies of using the written form (3, 8). Hülya emphasizes the implicit, spontaneous reception of a language (6, 9, 10), and at the same time

[7] BUSS (1995) interprets an interview with a Turkish woman in Germany whose story is quite similar to Hülya's in several respects. In any case she is a very successful learner. She mentions that watching television had helped her a lot in acquiring the German language ("und (...) hat ich dann halt auch spaeter immer zu Hause geuebt, also Fernsehen hat mir sehr viel geholfen" (BUSS 1995, p.255). I don't have any knowledge about the role of television in other contexts of emigration or in language biographies in general. Maybe this is a phenomenon that has to do with the isolation of Turkish women in their household sphere.

she uses the term "learning" (5) to designate all this in its entirety. When she says that she did not learn "in the right way," she apparently has in mind (as happens so often) the experience of spontaneous language acquisition, i.e., without a teacher in a school context. Hülya seems to prove again that this (centuries old) "method" can lead to good results.[8]

It seems to me (on the basis of many interviews on language biographies[9]) that Hülya's behavior is characteristic of a successful language learner: She has taken the initiative and takes responsibility for her own process of learning. On one hand her motivation is oriented to specific practical things, such as emergencies like muddling through labor court disputes, and her struggles to combat illness and restore her health; on the other hand, she also expresses that she has more and more contacts with Germans[10]. Something especially predisposes her for being a successful learner, she combines very different "methods" of language acquisition: implicit (e.g., hearing) and explicit (e.g., writing new words) (see ELLIS, 1994).

Contacts with Germans have especially positive consequences in this regard. In longitudinal studies on language acquisition of immigrants in Germany, this variable—e.g. the contact in leisure time with Germans—correlated most strongly with successful learning (Projekt HPD, 1975). It is this aspect which Hülya regards as the starting point of her "history of language learning."

Furthermore, it is remarkable in Hülya's narrative that all persons appearing on her stage who were important in the process of her language acquisition—and maybe took over the role of a "supporter" (FRANCESCHINI, 2001a)—remain anonymous. She just alludes to them: These are "people" whom she asked for the meaning of words with which she was unfamiliar—similar to the way of consulting a dictionary. This instrumental attitude is characteristic in her narrative about learning German.

3.2. Her communicative sensibility

When reading Hülya's narrative her successful language acquisition in just six years almost appears like a "miracle." But there are good reasons to assume

---

[8] The following texts are helpful as concise introductions to the research on language acquisition: KLEIN (1986) and LARSEN-FREMANN & LONG (1991). Cf. HPD (1975); KLEIN & DITTMAR (1979); MEISEL, CLAHSEN & PIENEMANN (1981); CLAHSEN, MEISEL & PIENEMANN (1983); KEIM (1984) with regard to immigration contexts in Germany. The comprehensive project of the European Science Foundation (ESF, 1991; PERDUE, 1993; PERDUE, 1996) is more recent and deals with other European contexts.

[9] Cf. Note 2 on language biographies.

[10] BUSS (1995, p.257) also emphasizes in his exemplary case (cf. Note 6) of a successful learner the fact that she presents herself as someone who is taking the initiative as an important factor of learning the language. She "increasingly (...) experiences herself as an autonomously acting, self determined individual who is able to use her linguistic competencies in order to intervene in her life circumstances and thereby gets her life under control again" (my translation, R.F.).

that Hülya has "caught" something of the German language even in the decisive years before 1980. Since she generally describes her environment in a detailed way and can sensibly communicate her impressions, it is quite likely that her language perception had also been differentiated.

Reading the interview against this backdrop and looking for (short) depictions of linguistic or communicative events in general, one can find that this happens to be the case quite often. It is noticeable that references to language matters are rare in the beginning, but appear at significant points, and that they become more frequent in the course of the interview.

The increase in the number of depictions of linguistic phenomena and communicative events, of interactions, of linguistic encounters in the course of the interview can be read in terms of iconicity. As Hülya's communicative competencies in Germany increased there were also more and more explicit references to verbal interaction in the interview.

In the course of Hülya's interview her way of expressing herself in German becomes more subtle and her German becomes more "correct." For instance, while she omits the copula and articles quite often in the beginning, this happens less frequently in the last part of the interview. One has the impression that the course of interaction maintains a certain iconicity with the presentational dimension, as if the process of language acquisition corresponds with the linguistic forms of the interview. A loose, but not accidental, connection joins things remembered with the modes of expression of *hic et nunc*.

I would like to follow this track by looking at some parts of the interview:

1) One can find one of the first references to verbal interaction when she refers to a conversation with her father (g.123, e.176). At this point the narrative moves into direct speech: "And then I was fourteen when I told my father, '*I also want to go to German*'." Hülya enacts the core of this statement—the announcement of her far-reaching decision that the interview revolves around—as direct speech (which I italicized). By doing so, she accomplishes a lively communicative scene before the interviewers.

There are also other key events and especially decisive moments in which Hülya presents by enacting explicitly communicative events. A recurring pattern appears somewhat later in the interview: After a long period of waiting, while working in the field with her sister, Hülya is notified that she can go to Germany. The arrival of the letter in the village is presented in direct speech (g.204, e.197).

This recurring pattern consists in presenting not so much the monotonous, hard and regular everyday life in communicative events, but the incisive, abrupt incidents. At these moments Hülya enacts the salient moments, the obstacles, the degradations and the suddenly appearing untoward events by making use of direct speech. This procedure serves to emphasize a certain event against the background of a long time span and to put in the foreground.

In this regard, direct speech is an especially suitable device. Now I will turn to the linguistic forms that Hülya presents in these instances of direct speech.

2) When Hülya talks about her first years in Germany she repeatedly reproduces xenolects.[11] In this context it is especially striking that she often enacts how superiors talk to her by using the typical simplified foreigner talk which is characterized by a strong talk-down-component.[12] E.g., in depicting her first work experiences she imitates a superior who talks to her:

> "er sagte, er hat lange versucht, immer gesagt: *mußt, du mußt machen. Putzen, wenn nicht, nach Tuerkei* wollten sie mich schicken. " (italics by R.F.) (g.420)
>
> In English: "he said/ he tried it for a long time, (he) always said, 'You have to, you have to do it, clean.' If not, they wanted to send me back to Turkey." (e.319)

Typically, foreigner talk has, among others, the following features: the infinitive form of the verb ("putzen"), the lack of articles, a simplification and nominalization of the syntax (without copula). The domineering imperative form is connected with the use of the "Du" pronoun (instead of the polite "Sie"). It is interesting that even Hülya falls back into the simplified register of foreigner talk before quoting her boss when she says, "immer gesagt" ("always said"). Here she also omits the copula and the subject. She gives the impression that while narrating she falls back into the variety which she had spoken in the beginning: as if her memory brings about a regression of linguistic forms. In any case, one can note that at the time of the interview she can imitate this variety which she had probably been exposed to quite often.

3) When Hülya quotes Turkish persons in direct speech she lets them talk longer than Germans and they talk in a normal way (e.g.: g.285, e.240). These persons are presented in a normal German, i.e., they talk like Hülya when communicating with the interviewers.

4) In the first part of the interview the direct speech of Germans frequently appears in short and staccato statements: "nix schlimm" "nix schlimm" (g.576, e.378) "zum Arzt!" (g.561, e.369). The verbal contacts are presented as short and formal during the interaction, they are described as short and limited in the presentational dimension. This might be an example of iconicity again: the form reflecting the experiential substance.

---

[11] Xenolects are those varieties that are used in interacting with persons who are regarded as strangers. Cf. ROCHE (1989) for German xenolects in particular.

[12] The features which are characteristic of foreigner talk were already explicated quite early. FERGUSON (1971) conducted a "classic" study of this phenomenon. These are some of the features: omission of the copula, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, article and obligatory subject pronouns (if present), verbs without flexion (mostly in infinitive), simple negation, no clitics, mostly combined with a slow articulation and an emphasis on gestures and prosody. The sentences are extremely short and contain many repetitions, questions are mostly bipolar, the lexicon is reduced to the most frequent words. Cf. MEISEL (1977) on *foreigner talk* and immigrant varieties.

5) It can be noticed that in the course of the interview (from the beginning until the key sequence that has been previously discussed) Hülya increasingly presents herself as a speaking subject. While in the beginning she just responds to her boss by way of gestures (cf. the scene of her first accident at work), she presents herself as fully competent in language matters when she talks more and more about her present life circumstances. But there are also interesting breaches.

Such a breach appears in the following passage. In terms of the presentational dimension she refers to that phase in which she does not yet attribute to herself sufficient German language competencies. She presents a medical result in indirect speech and uses the technical term "arbeitsfähig" ("able to work"):

> "Das war, ja, Ende 76 ... Und nach dem Blinddarmoperation eineinhalb Wochen später, mußt' ich wieder anfangen, weil er gesagt hat, ich bin wieder arbeitsfähig, aber ich fühlte mich überhaupt nicht." (g.1011)
>
> In the English version: "And .. that was, yeah, in the end of 1976 ... And one and a half weeks after the appendectomy I had to start working again because he said that I am "able to work" again, but I didn't feel like it at all." (e.581)

Of course, this breach between the competencies which she ascribes to herself in the presentational dimension and the words reported in the interaction do not allow us to draw direct conclusions about her linguistic competencies at that time. That would be a misunderstanding; the presentational dimension would be taken for granted in a positivist sense. But the divergence of these two levels opens up an interpretative horizon in which it becomes visible that from the beginning of her emigration Hülya has apparently acquired German language skills—without noticing it—and has spoken it more and more.

The key sequence that has been previously presented marks the threshold at which she slowly develops a consciousness of a process that had been latent for a long time. It is the point in time in which Hülya becomes aware of her competencies and takes the initiative to actively support them. She realizes that she can learn German and has to if she wants to defend herself; if she wants to know what kind of illness she has and why she had undergone an operation.

In summary, until the key sequence Hülya presents many, initially just fragmentary situations of communication. They indicate the communicative windows of being exposed to and coping with the new linguistic reality. In doing so, she presents the German language in unfriendly, hierarchical contexts of work, afterwards in contexts of accidents and illness, and only later in contexts of friendship. In referring to these situations Hülya demonstrates a high degree of linguistic sensibility.

3.3. The painful acquisition

If I put it in terms of theories of language acquisition, Hülya has lived through a long "silent period" during which she "had taken German in" in a more re-

ceptive way (DULAY, BURT, & KRASHEN, 1982). One can observe this phase not only among immigrants, but also among children in their very first language acquisition periods. These processes do not seem to be immediately accessible to the consciousness of the speakers. We can call this a kind of "black box" of language acquisition.

In any case, more seems to happen in this "silent period" than an outside observer and learner can recognize themselves. It is thus inappropriate to talk just about a "passive" reception. Such a period of being exposed can stimulate cognitive processes that learners themselves can just vaguely remember.

Narrative interviews, like the one we are dealing with, prove to be valuable in this regard since they contain slices of memory which provide clues to the experience of "being exposed" that can lead to unfocussed language acquisition. This is especially evident in instances of enacting communicative scenes like the ones I could draw on as examples. But Hülya also describes many other interactions that point to a multitude of situations in which spontaneous language acquisition can happen in general. Spontaneous language acquisition means the type of learning that does not take place under formal circumstances (in school with a teacher or in a course). Rather, it means that people acquire the new language in "real" situations in which they interact with speakers of a language. These examples are similar to the situations which Hülya describes, most of the time presenting herself as a "passive" listener.

Even though variants of spontaneous learning in situations of contact have been widespread for centuries, this phenomenon has recently caught the attention of linguists as they conducted research on language acquisition among immigrants. But spontaneous language acquisition is wide spread; apparently it is always the basis of acquisition. All these spontaneous, non-guided forms of learning can lead to remarkable competencies, even if they are not based on a very conscious, explicit way of acquisition.

Many research findings on immigration indicate that quite often language acquisition comes to a standstill in a basic variety and is fossilized at this level.[13] The basic variety is certainly sufficient for a simple, practical communication, but not for the expression of further reaching "skills." Regardless of whether learning the language spontaneously or in school contexts initially, all learners pass through this basic variety and remain there for some time before they move on. Fossilized speakers can remain in this level for their entire lives.

A special variant of spontaneous language acquisition is the level I call *unfocussed language learning*: learning a language "in passing" by being exposed

[13] The basic variety has simple sentences with verbs even though the flexion has not been established in all parts. PERDUE (1996) presents a detailed description. About one third of the persons who were studied in this comprehensive project "get stuck" on this level in the course of their language acquisition. The principles that guide the acquisition to this stage seem to have a universal nature.

to it and without paying much attention.[14] Although though these forms are inaccessible to direct observation, one cannot help but admit, according to the evidence we have that they provide a sufficient foundation or, at least, a disposition for a further reaching acquisition. As one can see in the above discussion, we could also discover indications of such processes in Hülya's case.

How did Hülya push the process of acquisition forward? How did she acquire further reaching competencies? Do we have to be content with a global and vague term like "talent"?

It is obvious that Hülya left the basic variety behind and proceeded to a more advanced learner variety. In the beginning of the interview she repeatedly presents herself as someone who is helplessly exposed to communication; in the course of the interview she turns to describing herself as an active person who requests information. How she goes about doing so becomes clear in some of her technical specifications (in the key sequence), which I discussed. But is there something like a key experience that pushed acquisition forward and produced a specific motivation (like falling in love, climbing up the career ladder, or coping with emergencies)?

To be sure, quite practical and essential necessities contributed to Hülya's taking the initiative; and the fact that she emigrated alone is also a reason for her establishing contacts by herself.[15] She did not experience being safe among other members of an "enclave" of Turkish immigrants. She had to be her own woman and "make it on her own."

The pivotal experience of developing a consciousness of acquiring the German language is related to Hülya's history of suffering and illness. There are several instances of intensive descriptions of this history. Her illness history reaches a special climax before the event that she describes in excerpt 1. The short description of her language acquisition is directly associated with her illness history. But it is also easy for a reader to sense that Hülya's narration of her illness communicates high emotional content: Being left alone in her suffering in a social context which is marked by a lack of solidarity—that is the substance of her descriptions until the key sequence quoted above—she has to fight her way through all kinds of obstacles. There is no assistance from her

[14] It is safe to assume that many non-anglophones acquire the English language in this way: in passing by listening to music, or by their interest in technical matters and computer games for instance. People "know" something of a language without being aware of what they know. If they are in a communicative (emergency) situation they suddenly notice how much can be activated on the basis of this purely receptive absorption. I studied such processes in my habilitation research that dealt with the unfocussed acquisition of the Italian language by German speakers in Switzerland. The research design also included language biographies (cf. Note 2 and FRANCESCHINI, 1998a).

[15] One of the findings of the project of the European Science Foundation (PERDUE, 1996) was that immigrants living alone were more successful in acquiring the new language than those who had emigrated with their families. The communicative necessities seem to force persons living alone to establish more contacts with their environment that is supportive of the process of acquisition.

fellow countrywomen and men; she mentions that they did not ask about her state of health.

Her process of language acquisition is accompanied by the suffering of her body; she has used and learned the German language during extremely painful experiences. Therefore it seems to be adequate to designate this as a *painful acquisition*.

4. Emotion and Language Acquisition

To some extent it seems to be counter intuitive that people develop good linguistic competence in unpleasant circumstances or negative contexts. It is common that language instructors make use of positive feelings and attitudes towards a language and attempt to foster a good relationship with native speakers of the language to be learned. Negative associations are avoided and positive feelings promoted. That is reasonable, for sure.[16]

But it is also possible that negative contexts and attitudes lead to good language acquisition, as we have learned in our research project on language biographies in the Central European context.[17] I mention the case of a German speaking Czech who after WW II acquired as an adult near native competence in the Czech language without losing his competencies in German and without overly assimilating. This happened despite the fact that he acquired the Czech language under constraints and in a context in which it was negative for the German-speaking minority. Both cases have in common great emotional impacts. It does not seem to be the direction of the feelings (positive or negative valences), but their *strength* that is decisive in this regard.

In the past several years there have been a growing number of research projects on the role of emotional valences in the process of language acquisition (cf. PULVERMÜLLER & SCHUMANN, 1994; SCHUMANN, 1998; NIEMEYER & DIRVEN, 1997). In this context the "appraisal system" plays a crucial role in memorizing. We constantly evaluate situations and associate emotional valences with events and especially with persons. The emotional evaluations apparently function like filters that contribute to the creation infor-

[16] Of course it would be a bit premature to conclude on the basis of Hülya's successful process of language acquisition and other similar cases, that a sort of "negative didactics" should be encouraged in schools in order to organize the process of learning languages! These findings just show how necessary it is to put a stronger emphasis on the individual life stories of single learners. Another conclusion is that classical language teaching should move away from the purely cognitive imparting of information and should develop more sensibility for the emotional aspects of cognitive processing. There is probably a lot of suspicion of such a holistic approach, since it can be negatively labeled as an almost esoteric didactics (which is probably true here and there). But that is a different topic.

[17] Cf. Note 2 and the cooperative project with the University of Prague which is mentioned there.

mation and to memorize it together with the respective emotional coloring. That means that emotional evaluations are important for cognitive processing. To put it simply: No cognitive achievement is free of emotions; the stronger the emotional involvement, the stronger are memories and knowledge. These close connections between cognition and emotion, which run counter to Cartesian thinking, have recently been supported by neurobiological findings (DAMASIO, 1994).

In biographical interviews and in diaries of language students (HALBACH, 2000) evaluations can be reconstructed on a narrative level via their linguistic forms and their respective contents. When narrating about learning processes—in this case processes of language learning, and everything that is important in this regard—emotional evaluations and associations are conveyed to the interaction partner. And we as observers of the interaction process can discover these communicative traces.

The instrument of the interpretive approach that we have applied in dealing with Hülya's narrative has included me as researcher (like few other research instruments) in the observation process. We were our own microscopes. The triangulation has turned out to be an extremely self-reflexive procedure that makes it difficult to reach closure. Therefore the dialogue will surely go on. At the same time the initially sketched program within a "quantum theoretical turn" does not break this frame, but is still in its methodological beginning stage. Interpretive approaches seem to offer a promising development in this regard, since interpretive methods appear to have an organic predisposition to the call for variability, non-constancy and self-organization.

For these reasons there is no concluding note at the end of this paper except for the call to keep the interpretive spiral of reflection spinning by transforming it into the research program of "doing biographical research."

References

Berger, Peter & Luckmann, Thomas (1966). *The social construction of reality. A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* New York: Penguin.

Buß, Stefan (1995). Zweitspracherwerb und soziale Integration als biographische Erfahrung. Eine Analyse narrativer Interviews mit türkischen Arbeitsmigranten. *Deutsch Lernen*, 3, 248-275.

Clahsen, Harald, Meisel, Jürgen M., & Pienemann, Manfred (1983). *Deutsch als Zweitsprache: der Spracherwerb ausländischer Arbeiter.* Tübingen: Narr.

Damasio, Antonio R. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain.* New York: Putnam's Sons.

Dulay, Helen, Burt, Marina, & Krashen, Stepen (1982). *Language two*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, Nick C. (Ed.) (1994). *Implicit and explicit learning of languages*. London: Academic Press.

ESF (1991). *ESF Network on code-switching and language contact. Papers for the Symposium on code-switching in bilingual studies: Theory, significance and perspectives, Barcelona, 21-23 March 1991*. Strasbourg: European Science Foundation, Strasbourg.

Ferguson, Charles A. (1971). Absence of copula and the notion of simplicity. A study of normal speech, baby talk, foreigner talk, and pidgins. In Dell Hymes (Ed.), *Pidginization and creolization of languages* (pp.141-50). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Feyerabend, Paul K. (1975). *Against method: Outline of an anarchist theory of knowledge*. London: Humanities Press.

Franceschini, Rita (1998a). *Italiano di contatto. Parlanti occasionali e riattivazioni di conoscenze non focalizzate*. Habilitationsschrift, Basel: Philosophische Fakultät der Universität Basel.

Franceschini, Rita (1998b). L'observateur et le système de la recherche linguistique: réflexions de méthodologie à la lumière du changement épistémologique. In Mortéza Mahmoudian & Lorenza Mondada (Eds.), *Le travail du chercheur sur le terrain. Questionner les pratiques, les méthodes, les techniques de l'enquête. ILSL*, 10, 69-89. [publication de l'Institut de Linguistique et des Sciences du Langage: Université de Lausanne, Lausanne].

Franceschini, Rita (1998c). Code-switching and the notion of Code in linguistics: Proposals for a dual focus model. In Peter Auer (Ed.), *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity* (pp.51-74). London: Routledge.

Franceschini, Rita (2000). A multilingual network in the re-activation of Italian as the third language among German speakers: Evidence from interactions. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 5(1), http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/ejournal.html.

Franceschini, Rita (2001a). "Adiuvant: die Figur der Stützperson im sprachbiographischen Interview mehrsprachiger Sprecher". In Thomas Keller & Freddy Raphaël (Eds.), *Biographies au pluriel, Biographien im Plural* (pp.227-238). Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg.

Franceschini, Rita (2001b). Sprachbiographien randständiger Sprecher. In Rita Franceschini (Ed.), *Biographie und Interkulturalität: Diskurs und Lebenspraxis* (pp.111-125). Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Franceschini, Rita (forthcoming). Linguistic biographies: the Basel-Prague Project and some possible generalizations about emotion and language acquisition. In Rita Franceschini & Johanna Miecznikowski-Fünfschilling (Eds.), *Leben mit mehreren Sprachen: Sprachbiographien im mittel- und aussereuropäischen Kontext*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Fünfschilling, Johanna (1998). Spracherwerb als Teil der Biographie: Zur Versprachlichung von Erwerbserinnerungen in narrativen Interviews. *Acta Romanica Basiliensia ARBA*, 65-79. (Dialogue entre linguistes, edited by Lorenza Mondada & Georges Lüdi).

Halbach, Ana (2000). Finding out about students' learning strategies by looking at their diaries: A case study. *System*, 28, 85-96.
Heisenberg, Werner (1955). *Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
HPD (1975). *Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch", Sprache und Kommunikation ausländischer Arbeiter. Analysen, Berichte, Materialien.* Kronberg Ts.: Scriptor.
Keim, Inken (1984). *Untersuchungen zum Deutsch türkischer Arbeiter*. Tübingen: Narr.
Klein, Wolfgang (1986). *Second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Klein, Wolfgang & Dittmar, Norbert (1979). *Developing grammars: The acquisition of German syntax by foreign workers*. Berlin: Springer.
Knorr-Cetina, Karin (1984). *Die Fabrikation von Erkenntnis. Zur Anthropologie der Wissenschaft.* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
Kummer-Hudabiunigg, Ingrid (1986). Geglückte Zweisprachigkeit im Erwachsenenalter. *Arbeiten zur Mehrsprachigkeit, 17*. Hamburg: Germanisches Seminar der Universität Hamburg.
Larsen-Freeman, Diane, & Long, Michael H. (1991). *An introduction to second language acquisition research*. London: Longman.
Lamnek, Siegfried (1995). *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, Vol. 1-2 (3rd edition). Weinheim: Beltz, Psychologie Verlags Union.
Luckmann, Thomas (1981). Lebenslauf und Sprache. In Joachim Matthes (Ed.), *Lebenswelt und soziale Probleme* (pp.55-65), Frankfurt a. M.: Campus.
Luhmann, Niklas (1995). Dekonstruktion als Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung. In Henk de Berg & Matthias Prangel (Eds.), *Differenzen. Systemtheorie zwischen Dekonstruktion und Konstruktivismus* (pp.9-35). Tübingen, Bern: Francke.
Luhmann, Niklas (1997). *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
Meisel, Jürgen M. (1977). Linguistic simplification: A study of immigrant workers' speech and foreigner talk. In Stephen P. Corder & Eddy Roulet (Eds.), *The notion of simplification, interlanguages and pidgins and their relation to second language pedagogy* (pp.88-113). Genève-Neuchâtel: Droz-Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Neuchâtel.
Meisel, Jürgen M., Clahsen, Harald, & Pienemann Manfred (1981). On determining developmental stages in natural second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 3(2), 109-135.
Niemeyer, Susanne & Dirven, René (Eds.) (1997). *The language of emotions: Conceptualization, expression, and theoretical foundation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
Perdue, Clive (Ed.) (1993). *Adult language acquisition: Cross-linguistic perspectives*, Vol.1-2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perdue, Clive (Ed.) (1996). (Written by members of the European Science Foundation project on adult language acquisition), *Adult language acquisition: Cross-linguistic perspectives*, Vol. 1-2 (2nd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pulvermüller, Friedemann & Schumann, John H. (1994). Neurobiological mechanisms of language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 44(4), 681-734.

Roche, Jörg (1989). *Xenolekte. Struktur und Variation im Deutsch gegenüber Ausländern*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Sacks, Harvey (1992). *Lectures on conversation*, Vol. 1-2. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Schütze, Fritz (1987). *Das narrative Interview in Interaktionsfeldstudien*. Hagen: Fernuniversität Gesamthochschule Hagen.

Schumann, John (1998). *The neurobiology of affect in language*. London: Blackwell (spec. issue of Language Learning 48).

Steinmüller, Ulrich (1992). Spracherwerbsbiographie und Zweisprachigkeit. *Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*, 41(5), 25-40.

Wildgen, Wolfgang (1999). *De la grammaire au discours*, Bern: Lang.

Wildgen, Wolfgang & Mottron, Laurent (1987). *Dynamische Sprachtheorie. Sprachbeschreibung und Spracherklärung nach den Prinzipien der Selbstorganisation und der Morphogenese*. Bochum: Brockmeyer.

Zini, Virginia (1992). *Narrative structures in interviews of second language learners. Arbeiten zur Mehrsprachigkeit*, 46. Hamburg: Germanisches Seminar der Universität Hamburg.